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ABSTRACT

A study used the "Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom" to examine censorship cases in New Hampshire for the period 1966-1980. New Hampshire's reputation as a politically conservative state was upheld by the frequency of censorship incidents found, which was 1.5 times the national average in terms of population. Half the 15-year total of incidents occurred between 1973 and 1976. Although attacks were limited to educational institutions in the early 1970s, over the entire period they were evenly divided between educational and noneducational institutions. Most reported attacks took place in the cities and towns of the heavily populated southern part of the state, and originated from a variety of sources, including private citizens, parents, the police, and even librarians. In noneducational institutions, obscenity was the most frequent reason for complaints. More censorship attempts occurred in high schools than in any other educational institutions. For both kinds of institutions, a majority of censorship attempts were at least partially successful, although the success rate of 62% was lower than the national average. (JL)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

"Castrating the Cat";
Censorship in New Hampshire, 1966-1980

by

L.B. Woods and Kathleen Donovan

One would expect that a state which has produced such nationally known fervent conservatives as former governor Meldrim Thompson and the now-deceased publisher William Loeb, would be constantly subject to attacks on intellectual freedom. Headlines of the only daily newspaper with state-wide circulation have boldly denounced Henry Kissinger as a "tool of the communist conspiracy" and lumped liberal Democrats together as "left wing kooks."[1] It would seem to follow that New Hampshire residents might be intolerant of expressions of intellectual freedom, and the state would be a fertile breeding ground for censors.

Not surprisingly, that is exactly the case. This paper is a look at censorship cases in the Granite State for the period 1966-1980. During that time, the country saw many changes, including some dramatic experimentations carried out by the media and art world. These innovations and some accompanying attempts at loosening traditional morality often met with opposition and open hostility. New Hampshire, although slower to feel these changes, was not immune, but the method of dealing with them appears to have been somewhat different from other parts of the country. An examination of the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom published by the Office of Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association upholds this postulation.

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Indexes of censorship were determined by dividing the ratio of a state's citations in the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom from 1966-1980 by the ratio of its population compared to the national population. In New Hampshire, twenty cases were reported out of a national total of 3027, or 0.6 percent.[2] The state population for the base year 1980 was 920,600, or 0.4 percent of the national population.[3] Dividing 0.6 by 0.4 produces a censorship index of 1.5 which is fifty percent above the national average index of 1.0.[4]

This study is limited only to those cases which have been recorded in the Newsletter. Therefore, it is likely that many incidents went unreported and the number of censorship cases occurring in New Hampshire could be much higher.

Statistics on all the recorded incidences between 1966 and 1980 are shown in Tables 1 through 7, separated by educational and non-educational institutions.

Table I indicates that the years 1973-1976 were the peak years for censorship incidences with half of the fifteen year total occurring during those four years. However, at least one case was recorded somewhere in the state every year until 1979 and 1980 when no cases were reported. Attacks were evenly divided between educational and non-educational institutions over the fifteen year period, but were limited to educational institutions in the early seventies.

TABLE I
NUMBER OF CENSORSHIP CASES REPORTED

Educational Institutions		Non-Educational Institutions	
1966	1	1967	1
1970	1	1968	1
1971	1	1969	1
1972	1	1974	2
1973	2	1975	2
1975	2	1976	2
1976	1	1977	1
1978	1		

Table II indicates that cities and towns in the more heavily populated southern part of the state were responsible for most reported attacks. Of the fifteen twons recorded, only two are more than forty miles from the Massachusetts border and are considered rural. The rest are in that part of the state which is one of the fastest growing areas of the country because of the tremendous growth of high technology industry there during the past fifteen years. The state's capital, Concord, was the site of four reported cases, primarily because that was where the governor attacked a statewide organization, the New Hampshire Arts Commission.

TABLE II

PLACES OF ATTACKS

Educational Institutions		Non-educational Institutions	
Conway	1	Concord	4
Dover	1	Exeter	1
Durham	2	Manchester	2
Hillsboro	1	Nashua	1
Milton	1	North Haverhill	1
Oyster River	1	Portsmouth	1
Penacook	1	Salem	1
Portsmouth	1		
Unknown	1		

Censorship attempts originated from a variety of sources, some rather surprising, as Table III indicates. Meldrim Thompson, during his often tempestuous term in office from 1973 to 1979, instigated three different attacks. In 1974, he withheld a $750 grant that had been awarded by the New Hampshire Commission on the Arts to Granite Magazine. He disliked a poem published two years earlier, entitled "Castrating the Cat."[5] The Board of Directors of the Coordination Council of Literary Magazines awarded a $750 emergency grant to the magazine and sent a strongly worded letter of protest to the governor.

The next year (1975) the gov[illegible]nor rejected a $3,500 federal grant to the New Hampshire Commission on [illegible] Arts from the National Endowment of the Arts which was to have fin[illegible]nced poetry readings. The governor said there were no safeguards against obsc[illegible]nities in the readings.[6]

Also in 1975, he threatened to cut off tax support of the University of New Hampshire because the Gay Student Organization there wanted to hold a dance. The United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit ruled that the University cannot ban the organization from holding dances or other social functions on campus.[7]

TABLE IV
SOURCES OF ATTEMPTS

Educational Institutions		Non-Educational Institutions	
Citizen	2	Citizen	2
Citizens group	2	Governor	2
Governor	1	Librarian	1
Parents	3	Police	4
School Board	2	Unknown	1

A somewhat disturbing censorship incident occurred in the Nashua Public Library in 1968. The librarians themselves, apparently without any outside urging, voluntarily placed certain titles on closed shelves or coded them and left them in the open stacks. They were books whose national reputation indicated that they had "been under fire in the past."[8]

Parents and private citizens were the most active in censorship cases in educational institutions, being responsible for a total of nine attacks. These ranged from banning the Oyster River High School underground newspaper because it was publishing "inflammatory materials,"[9] to trying to ban Mademoiselle magazine from Merrimack Valley Regional High School Library because it contained articles on homosexuality, blasphemy, and contraceptives, among other things.[10]

In educational institutions, language was the most frequently cited reason for banning materials, followed closely by homosexuality and political controversy.

The University of New Hampshire had its share of censorship attempts during this period. One of them was pointed out by a member of the John Birch Society who complained that the university library had a number of what he considered to

be left wing publications, but very few right wing. He wanted a better political balance.[11] If the library was purposely keeping the right wing publications out of the collection, this is another example of librarians practicing censorship.

Among non-educational institutions, obscenity outnumbered the total of other complaints as can be seen in Table IV. There were the usual complaints against movies, magazines, and books, but one non-obscene case came from the Jehovah's Witnesses against New Hampshire license plates. A federal court ruled in 1976 that it is unconstitutional to require motorists to carry the state motto "Live free or die" on auto license plates on the grounds that it forces "an involuntary affirmation of a philosophical and political idea" with which the motorist might not agree.[12]

TABLE IV
REASON FOR ATTACK

Educational Institutions		Non-Educational Institutions	
Language	3	Obscene	8
Poor taste	1	Politically controversial	1
Homosexuality	2	Philosophically controversial	1
Nudity	1	No reason given	1
Inflammatory material	1		
Non-school literature	1		
Obscene	1		
Politically controversial	2		
No reason given	1		

New Hampshire followed the national trend in that more censorship attempts occurred in high schools than any other educational institutions. Table V also lists a case in an elementary school. That case involved all the schools in Portsmouth when the Board of Education tried to ban non-school literature (specifically the Strawberry Grenade magazine) from school grounds. The U.S. District Court ruled that action was unconstitutional and the students who had been suspended for distributing the materials had their records cleared.[13]

TABLE V
INSTITUTIONS AFFECTED

Educational Institutions		Non-Educational Institutions	
Elementary school	1	Newsstand	3
Middle school	2	Movie theater	2
High school	7	Auto owners	1
University	2	Drug store	1
		Public library	1
		Book store	1
		N.H. Arts Commission	2

Among the non-educational institutions, those selling "dirty magazines" and showing "dirty movies" were most under attack with a total of eight of these outlets. Among their victims were such well-known controversial works as Penthouse and Playboy and the films Deep Throat and The Devil in Miss Jones (These particular titles show up in many censorship studies.).

Table VI also shows that in 1975, a theater owner in North Haverhill was acquitted of obscenity charges for the second time in less than a year. He also happened to be the Grafton County attorney. As co-owner of the theater, his sixty-two year old mother was also acquitted. [14]

TABLE VI
MATERIALS UNDER ATTACK

Educational Institutions	Non-Educational Institutions
Books:	Books:
Manchild in the Promised Land	Kinsey Reports
One Day in the Life of Ivan...	Tropic of Cancer
Janis	The Carpetbaggers
The New Underground Theater Collection of Plays	Valley of the Dolls
The Pigman	Magazines:
Magazines:	Penthouse
Mademoiselle	Playboy
Strawberry Grenade	Granite Magazine
Various right-wing publications	Movies:
Underground student newspaper	Ingar
Gay Students Organization	Deep Throat
	The Devil in Miss Jones
	Others:
	Poetry readings
	License Plates

Table VII gives a breakdown of the disposition of the attacks. A majority (sixty-two percent) of attempts were at least partially successful, evenly divided between educational and non-educational institutions. In this survey, successful attempts were defined as those that succeeded in having materials banned or having fines levied, partially successful were those that involved restricted access to materials, and unsuccessful were those in which censors were unable to block free access to the materials in question.

TABLE VII
DISPOSITION OF ATTACKS

Educational Institutions		Non-Educational Institutions	
Successful	5	Successful	6
Partially successful	1	Partially successful	1
Unsuccessful	3	Unsuccessful	2
Unknown	2		

New Hampshire, although its censorship attempt rate is higher than the national average, has a lower success rate than the national average. However, New Hampshire residents must not become smug and complacent. Perhaps a reason why there have been no reported cases in the last four years is not that residents have become open-minded, liberal thinkers, but rather that librarians, educators, and others have learned how to play the censorship game. Could they be censoring materials before they reach the public? It is because of the opportunity to make choices that intellectual growth occurs.

Concerned citizens must be aware not only of public attacks on First Ammendment rights, but also of behind the scenes denial of materials. The existence of censorship is a sad comment on how important some people view their freedoms. Nevertheless, censorship attempts serve as a visible reminder that controversial materials are available in some form, somewhere.

REFERENCES

[1]"Loeb Dies," New York Times, 14 September 1981, p.15.

[2]The information presented is the result of data compiled from all issues of the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom published by ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom from 1966 through 1980.

[3]World Almanac and Book of Facts 1982 (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, 1982), p.195.

[4]For reports of censorship nationwide, see L.B. Woods, "For Sex: See Librarian," Library Journal 103 (1 September 1978): 1561-6 and "The Most Censored Materials in the U.S.," Library Journal 103 (1 November 1978): 2170-3.

[5]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 24 (September 1975): 152.

[6]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 24 (May 1975): 79.

[7]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 24 (March 1975): 49.

[8]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 17 (July 1968): 46.

[9]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 19 (September 1970): 74.

[10]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 27 (September 1978): 118.

[11]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 15 (July 1966): 39.

[12]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 25 (May 1976): 73.

[13]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 22 (May 1973): 62-3.

[14]Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom 24 (May 1975): 84.